

Sobhraj's fiancée fights bigamy slur

Plunged into a media whirlpool within hours of her engagement to criminal mastermind Charles Sobhraj becoming public, 20-year-old Nepali beauty Nihita Biswas Saturday took up cudgels on behalf of her jailed 64-year-old love to fight media allegations that he is a bigamist.

While Nihita is being hounded by the media, both from home and abroad, Sobhraj, serving a 20-year jail term for the murder of an American tourist more than three decades ago, has had his past raked up by the media that is making no attempt to sift gossip from proven facts.

'Sobhraj faces bigamy charge if he remarries,' Nepali daily Himalayan Times said in a front-page report Saturday.

'Sobhraj is already married to Chantal, who lives in France,' the daily said. 'He also has a wife in Australia.'

On Friday, an Indian television station aired a telephonic conversation with one of Sobhraj's lawyers, who said he was 'shocked' to hear about the engagement, especially since Sobhraj was already married.

Nihita is rebutting the charge of bigamy, calling it 'absolutely false and defamatory'.

In her rejoinders to the TV station as well as the daily, she says Sobhraj married a French woman in 1969 but the marriage ended eight years later.

In 1976, after Indian police arrested Sobhraj and he was sent to New Delhi's Tihar Jail, his French wife sued for divorce and in 1977, a Paris court granted it.

There are dozens of official documents to prove the divorce, including some at the French Embassy in New Delhi, which sent an official to Tihar Jail to meet Sobhraj and inform him about the divorce decree, Nihita says.

After he was deported from India in the 1990s, Sobhraj came together with his former wife for the sake of their daughter but they never officially remarried.

Regarding the allegation that he also married an Australian woman, the new fiancée, whom Sobhraj affectionately calls his 'little wife', says that the two were never married. He had met the Australian in Tihar and never after that, a fact, Nihita says, was chronicled in a documentary that was shown in Nepal's Supreme Court this year.

Nihita adds that when Sobhraj is released, they would get married under French law in Paris where Nepali matrimonial laws have no jurisdiction.

While Sobhraj is used to hitting the headlines since the 1960s, this is Nihita's first bout with the media. Though it has left her bruised and stunned, it has also increased her determination to marry him.

Now sought after by major television channels at home and abroad, she is determined to get their

story across. She is highlighting the fact that prior to Nepal, Sobhraj was never convicted of murder or manslaughter anywhere and it is defamatory to call him 'bikini killer' or a serial killer.

Though a Nepali district court four years ago pronounced him guilty of the murder of Connie Jo Bronzich and the verdict was upheld by a court of appeals, Sobhraj is now fighting the jail term in Nepal's Supreme Court, saying that police have not provided a single original document but only photocopies, which are 'crude forgeries'.

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)